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SUBJECT: MEDIA REACTION REPORT - LEBANON: ASSASSINATION OF HARIRI - SYRIA KYOTO U.S - EUROPEAN RELATIONS  
PARIS - WEDNESDAY, FEBRUARY 16, 2005

(A) SUBJECTS COVERED IN TODAY'S REPORT:

1. LEBANON: ASSASSINATION OF HARIRI - SYRIA
2. KYOTO
3. U.S - EUROPEAN RELATIONS

B) SUMMARY OF COVERAGE:

EXECUTIVE LIFE IS TODAY'S TOP HEADLINE STORY, WITH LE FIGARO, LA TRIBUNE AND LES ECHOS REPORTING THAT FRANCE IS READY TO PAY THE CALIFORNIA INSURANCE COMMISSION BETWEEN 525 AND 600 MILLION DOLLARS TO AVOID A CIVIL SUIT.

THE SECOND STORY ELICITING MUCH COMMENTARY IS THE AFTERMATH OF HARIRI'S ASSASSINATION IN LEBANON, WITH QUESTIONS ABOUT SYRIA'S INVOLVEMENT, AND THE IMPLICATIONS FOR LEBANON'S ELECTIONS. (SEE PART C)

AS THE KYOTO PROTOCOL GOES INTO EFFECT TODAY, MANY REPORTS AND COMMENTARIES ANALYZE THE IMPACT OF ITS IMPLEMENTATION, "WITHOUT THE GREATEST POLLUTER OF THEM ALL, THE U.S" AS WELL AS THE TREATY'S LIMITATIONS. OVERALL, MOST AGREE "IT WAS ABOUT TIME." (SEE PART C) IN CATHOLIC LA CROIX, FORMER SOCIALIST PRIME MINISTER LAURENT FABIOUS PENS AN OP-ED IN WHICH HE CALLS FOR "ACTION RATHER THAN WORDS." "WE MUST REJOICE OVER THE KYOTO PROTOCOL'S IMPLEMENTATION, EVEN IF IT IS ONLY PARTIAL AND COMES LATE. BUT WHAT IS IMPORTANT IS TO ACT. INCLUDING IN FRANCE, WHERE THERE IS A MAJOR DISCREPANCY BETWEEN PRESIDENT CHIRAC'S WORDS AND FRANCE'S REDUCED ENVIRONMENTAL BUDGET, WHICH HAS EARNED US LAST PLACE IN EUROPE."

RIGHT-OF-CENTER LES ECHOS INTERVIEWS DEFENSE MINISTER ALLIOT-MARIE: "THE TRANSATLANTIC RELATIONSHIP IS FUNDAMENTAL FOR US, ESPECIALLY IN DEFENSE MATTERS. AND NATO IS JUST AS IMPORTANT FOR HOW WE CONCEIVE EUROPE'S DEFENSE. I DO NOT BELIEVE THERE IS A NEED FOR FRANCE TO RE-ENGAGE IN NATO. FRANCE IS A FULL CONTRIBUTOR TO NATO. EUROPE'S DEFENSE INITIATIVE IS ALSO A PLUS FOR NATO BECAUSE IF WE ARE STRONGER, WE CAN MORE EASILY TAKE OUR PLACE IN NATO OPERATIONS. EUROPE'S DEFENSE IS NOT IMPLEMENTED AGAINST NATO. THERE WAS AN ERROR IN THE MINDS OF SOME AMERICANS. WHICH HAS BEEN CLEARED UP."

DANIEL VERNET IN LEFT-OF-CENTER LE MONDE PREVIEWS PRESIDENT BUSH'S TRIP TO EUROPE AND SAYS EUROPEANS NEED TO FIND AGREEMENT ON THEIR MESSAGES TO THE PRESIDENT IN ORDER TO BE TAKEN SERIOUSLY.

(C) SUPPORTING TEXT/BLOCK QUOTES:

LEBANON: ASSASSINATION OF HARIRI - SYRIA

"WASHINGTON WANTS TO PUNISH SYRIA"

PHILIPPE GELIE IN RIGHT-OF-CENTER LE FIGARO (02/16):

"WASHINGTON DOES NOT KNOW WHO IS BEHIND HARIRI'S ASSASSINATION, BUT IT HAS FOUND A TARGET FOR ITS ANGER: SYRIA. IN THE EYES OF THE BUSH ADMINISTRATION, SYRIA HAS ENOUGH FAULTS TO WARRANT WASHINGTON'S ANGER AND TO PAY FOR THE CONSEQUENCES OF THIS ASSASSINATION, WHETHER IT IS BEHIND IT OR NOT. IF WASHINGTON'S STANCE BECOMES HARSHER, ESPECIALLY WITH ITS SYRIA ACCOUNTABILITY ACT, ONE MAY CONCLUDE THAT EL-ASSAD HAS MADE THE WORST POSSIBLE POLICY CHOICE VIS-A-VIS WASHINGTON. THE LIST OF CONFLICTS WAS ALREADY LONG. BUT NOW THAT THE PEACE PROCESS IN THE MIDDLE EAST IS COMING OUT OF ITS COMA, SYRIA'S AMBIVALENCE IS MAKING AMERICANS AND ISRAELIS VERY NERVOUS."

"WHY WAS HARIRI KILLED?"

ALEXANDRE ADLER IN RIGHT-OF-CENTER LE FIGARO (02/16): "THE U.S. AND FRANCE WILL PROBABLY NOT GIVE UP ON THEIR UN RESOLUTION AGAINST DAMASCUS. AND SO THE ONLY CONCLUSION ONE CAN ARRIVE AT IS THAT (BEHIND THIS ASSASSINATION) THERE IS THE IN-FIGHTING FOR POWER IN DAMASCUS. OUR TEMPORARY CONCLUSION IS THAT THE TARGET BEHIND HARIRI'S TERRIBLE ASSASSINATION IS BACHAR EL-ASSAD AND DAMASCUS'S MODERATES. THE ASSASSINATION ANNOUNCES A MAJOR STRATEGIC BREAK BETWEEN TWO OLD ALLIES: SYRIA AND IRAN. THE ONE CANNOT ACCEPT THE FACT THAT IRAQ HAS FALLEN INTO THE HANDS OF THE SHIITES AND THE OTHER CANNOT HELP

BUT GIVE IT ITS SUPPORT, MORE FOR REASONS OF TRADITION THAN FOR REASONS OF STRATEGY."

KYOTO

"CONSERVATION"

PATRICK SABATIER IN LEFT-OF-CENTER LIBERATION (02/16):

"REPHRASING A FAMOUS SAYING, IT IS A SMALL STEP FOR DIPLOMACY AND A BIG STEP FOR MANKIND. THE KYOTO PROTOCOL'S GESTATION WAS LONG AND PAINFUL. AFTER TWENTY YEARS, SOME POLITICIANS -PRESIDENT BUSH THE FIRST OF MANY - ARE STILL NOT CONVINCED OF THE URGENCY OF THE MATTER. WE CANNOT EXPECT MIRACLES FROM KYOTO, AT BEST IT IS A FIRST STEP. MODERN SOCIETIES ARE BUILT ON THE CONSUMPTION OF NATURAL RESOURCES, WITH THE U.S. SHOWING THE WAY. THE POLITICAL REVOLUTION WILL BE TO IMPOSE THE NEED TO MASTER ENERGY CONSUMPTION AND TO BASE ALL POLICIES ON THE NEED TO CONSERVE ENERGY RESOURCES. IN THIS ERA, BEING CONSERVATIVE IS REALLY REVOLUTIONARY."

"KYOTO, FINALLY"

LEFT-OF-CENTER LE MONDE IN ITS EDITORIAL (02/16): "THINGS ARE CHANGING IN THE U.S. THE BUSH ADMINISTRATION IS GOING TO HAVE TO COME TO TERMS WITH ITS ISOLATION ON THE INTERNATIONAL ARENA - SOMETHING PRESIDENT BUSH IS FAMILIAR WITH - BUT ALSO WITH AMERICAN PUBLIC OPINION. PRESIDENT CHIRAC'S GOAL IS TO INCLUDE THE U.S. IN THE FIGHT AGAINST CLIMATE CHANGE IN SPITE OF HIS OBVIOUS DISREGARD FOR THIS ISSUE."

U.S -EU RELATIONS

"THE EU 25 AND THE BUSH REVOLUTION"

DANIEL VERNET IN LEFT-OF-CENTER LE MONDE (02/16): "THE EUROPEANS HAVE A PRETTY GOOD IDEA OF WHAT PRESIDENT BUSH WILL TELL THEM NEXT WEEK. SECRETARY RICE ALREADY GAVE THEM A PREVIEW OF THE MAJOR THEMES. ALONG WITH THE PRESIDENT'S INAUGURAL SPEECH, THESE TWO TEXTS SUMMARIZE THE NEO-CONSERVATIVE RHETORIC OF THE ADMINISTRATION. ARROGANCE. HAS BEEN REPLACED WITH RECONCILIATION AND DIALOGUE WITH THE EUROPEANS. BUT THE FUNDAMENTALS REMAIN THE SAME. THE U.S. IS NOT A NATION OF STATUS QUOS. IT WANTS TO CHANGE THE WORLD AND DO AWAY WITH TYRANNIES. WHAT IS NEW IS THAT THE U.S. WANTS TO DO IT WITH EUROPE. AND THAT THE U.S. RECOGNIZES IT NEEDS THE EUROPEANS. THE TIME HAS COME NOW FOR THE EUROPEANS TO ANSWER THE AMERICANS. PRESIDENT BUSH IS COMING TO EUROPE, NOT TO REPEAT WHAT HE AND CONDOLEEZZA RICE HAVE ALREADY SAID, BUT TO LISTEN TO WHAT THE EUROPEANS HAVE TO SAY. THE EUROPEANS ARE FOR THE MOST PART AGAINST THE TYPE OF IDEOLOGICAL LANGUAGE PRESIDENT BUSH USES. FOR THEM, DEFENDING THE STATUS QUO IS A NATURAL. IT IS A TOKEN OF STABILITY. THE BUSH ADMINISTRATION DISTURBS THE EUROPEANS, WITH ITS MIX OF CHRISTIAN LANGUAGE AND DEMOCRATIC MESSIANISM. WITH ALL THIS, ONE WONDERS WHETHER RE-SHAPING THE TRANSATLANTIC RELATIONSHIP IN DEPTH WILL BE A REALITY OR JUST SOMETHING DONE ON THE SURFACE. IF THE EU HOPES TO BE TAKEN SERIOUSLY BY THE U.S. PRESIDENT, ALL OF ITS MEMBERS NEED TO MEET AND AGREE ON WHAT THEY WILL SAY TO HIM. THEY HAVE A WEEK TO DO IT." LEACH